

MASCULINE-FEMININE COMPLEMENTARITY IN THE SPIRITUAL PSYCHOLOGY OF ISLAM

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Many books have been written about the role of women in Islam, but relatively little has been said concerning the Muslim understanding of the feminine. It has seldom been pointed out that Islamic text often discuss the relationship between masculine and feminine principles in a manner quite reminiscent of Far Eastern treatments of *Yin-Yang* complementarity. The present paper focuses on a single dimension of these relatively abstract discussions of the nature of femininity with the hope that some light may be shed on the traditional understanding of the feminine in Islamic Civilization.

Among various schools of Islamic thought, the Sufis placed emphasis upon "meaning" as opposed to "form", which means that they were always concerned to understand the scriptural and traditional teachings not only as literal dogmas, but also as symbols and pointers, and thus accessible to interpretation on a number of levels. That is why, for example, they wrote long and detailed treatises explaining the meaning of all the acts that people are required to perform according to Islamic Law. Most people were satisfied to be told that they must wash themselves in a certain prescribed manner before praying; if the great authorities said that it had to be done in a certain way, that was sufficient proof. But Sufis wrote volumes on the symbolism of these acts and how they put the human being into harmony with all of Creation and with God. In short, a person trying to understand the meaning of Islamic dogmatic formulations and ritual forms will not suffer from a lack of explanations if he looks to the writings of the Sufis. Hence it is their help which has been sought in the present paper.

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There is a well-known saying of the Prophet Muhammad that certain female orientalists in particular have liked to quote, usually to illustrate the "primitive" level of Muslim ideas about women: "Women are deficient in intelligence and religion." It is normally assumed that this saying means exactly what it says, and nothing else. No one has suggested that by "women" may be understood something other than human beings of the female sex. One goal of this paper is to suggest that, beyond the literal meaning, such sayings have another level of meaning that has profoundly influenced the Muslim consciousness.

Those orientalists who have wished to show another side to the role of women in Islam have had other prophetic sayings to choose from. For example, the Prophet said, "I was made to love three things of this lower world of yours: women, perfume, and prayer." The great Sufi Ibn al-'Arabi (d. 1240), in an oft-quoted passage, comments in detail on this saying, concluding that "a man's most perfect contemplation of God takes place in women... . That is why the Prophet loved women: because of the perfect contemplation of God within them .. for God can never be contemplated apart from manifested forms Hence the contemplation of God in women is the most tremendous and the most perfect contemplation."¹

A careful reading of the Qur'an and Hadith shows that Islam's basic view of men and women is one of a complementarity of functions. Neither can be complete without the other. Many verses and saying could be cited to illustrate this, but here let me just recall the Qur'an's insistence that all things are created "in pairs" (51:49) and the Prophet's stressing of the desirability of marriage for full human perfection, for, he said, "Marriage is one-half of the religion." Islamic thought perceives the universe as an equilibrium built upon the harmonious relationships among the "pairs," including men and women. In addition, all the outward phenomena of the universe are considered to be reflections of inward noumena. The Qur'an constantly stresses that the creatures of the universe are nothing but the "signs" of God. All the pairs, male and female included, must manifest something of the divine nature itself.

Muslim theologians, especially those of Sufi inclination, have written a great deal on the prototypes of male and female *in divinis*, though this must remain the topic for another occasion. Here I will concentrate on the intermediate realm that Muslim thinkers sometime call the "isthmus" (*barzakh*) between God and the world, i.e., the spiritual and psychic realms. Once Islamic theories of the psyche are understood, it is much easier to understand the Muslim view of the nature of the "human pair" and the fact that male and female always should be interrelated in an ideal manner.

The basic "givens" of the Islamic psychological teachings with which the present paper is concerned can be summarized as follows: A human being is compounded of spirit, soul, and body. The spirit is made of light; like

angels, it is totally disengaged and free of the bodily world. It is a single reality, with no composition. In contrast the body is made of clay, which is multiple and dark. So there can be no direct relationship between the simple and transcendent reality which is the spirit and the dark conglomeration of parts which is the body. Hence God created the soul as an intermediary existence between the two.

If the spirit is light and the body is clay, the soul is fire. It is a mixture of light and clay, both one and multiple at the same time. It is subtle and luminous enough to establish a link with the spirit, but gross and dark enough to control the body.

In Islamic cosmology, for reasons that will be explained below, the spirit is masculine and the soul feminine, at least in their immediately obvious characteristics. But other relationships can be discerned, so male and female exist at each level. For example, masculinity and femininity are normally described in terms of activity and receptivity. In the cosmic hierarchy, repeated within the human being, God creates the spirit, so God is active or masculine and the spirit receptive or feminine. Then the spirit governs the soul, so it takes on masculine characteristics in relation to the feminine soul. Finally the soul governs the body, so the "feminine" soul becomes masculine in this respect. From this point of view, both spirit and soul possess masculine and feminine properties. Hence each human being, whether male or female, possesses both masculine and feminine characteristics in psychological make-up. It is especially in this sort of discussion that one can see the similarity between Muslim theories of male-female or active-receptive complementarity and the concept of *Yin-Yang*.

Muslim commentators on the Qur'an are often literal-minded. But the Qur'an is constantly asking its readers to meditate upon its verses and to understand them as signs and symbols. A typical verse describes water coming down from heaven, such that each stream-bed carries its own capacity. The verse ends by saying, "Even so does God strike similitudes" (13:17), i.e., even so does God speak in symbols. Hence the commentators agree that by "water" and "stream-beds" is meant something else, e.g., "knowledge" and "human understandings." The Sufis were the first to affirm that talk of "women" in the scripture could not mean only female human beings, but must refer primarily to feminine realities and cosmic principles, i.e., those things that are symbolized by female beings. For example, "women" can refer to the spirit in relation to God or to the soul in relation to the spirit. Once it has been understood in this light the saying quoted earlier takes on, in addition to its literal meaning, a second, symbolic meaning: "Women are deficient in intelligence and religion" is understood to refer to the human soul that must be perfected through the spiritual life. In other words, the saying is understood to refer to the situation of the soul in relation to the spirit. "Women," that is soul, are

deficient in "intelligence" unless they heed their own inward lights by turning to their spiritual source, and "religion," unless they follow the Qur'an and the way of the Prophet. In this perspective, the saying can only be understood as a condemnation inasmuch as it is referring to those human beings, whether male or female, who are dominated by worldliness and passivity towards their own lower instincts. A "man" in this spiritual interpretation is someone whose spirit or intellect has been actualized such that it rules over the feminine soul. So a "woman" is a person, who may well be a man, receptive towards everything that leads the soul away from God, while a "man" is active towards the soul and its dispersive tendencies.

It is this sort of understanding of Qur'anic verses and prophetic saying that leads many Sufis to speak of "men" and "women" in a manner that emphasizes the spiritual and symbolic sense of the terms while ignoring the outward, physical reality. Whether a person is a "man" or a "woman" does not depend upon outward physical characteristics, but upon whether or not he or she follows the guiding lights of intellect in the inner world and revelation in the outside world. If you do not follow these lights, you are a woman; if you do, you are a man.

Perhaps it needs to be stressed that the choice of "woman" as the negative symbol is not arbitrary, since activity and receptivity, *Yang* and *Yin*, fill the universe, which God created "in pairs." There is always a correct relationship that corresponds to the "Tao" and this is the relationship which makes the spirit or intellect active or *Yang* in relation to the receptive or *Yin* soul.

However, there is another side to this whole question, to which a separate study will have to be dedicated. The saying, "Women are deficient in intelligence and religion," refers to the passivity of the soul in relation to the world. But if the soul attains to perfection for which it was created, it will follow the divine Will in all things. In Far Eastern terms, earth will be in equilibrium with heaven and all things will work in harmony with the "Tao". Here the soul is feminine not in relation to the world, but in relation to the spirit and God, so its femininity is totally positive. It is this second, positive symbolism of women which is implied in the second saying of the Prophet quoted above and its interpretation by Ibn al-'Arabi. Woman, or the perfected soul, becomes the mirror for all the divine qualities, so she is infinitely worthy of love. In this symbolism, women dominate over spiritual men, since the soul is in harmony with heaven and governs all outward activity. As Rumi writes,

"The Prophet said that women totally dominate over men of intellect and possessors of hearts,
But ignorant men dominate over women, for they are shackled
by the ferocity of animals...
Woman is the radiance of God, she is not just your beloved. She

is the Creator, you could say that she is not created."²

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One of the Sufis' primary concerns was to explain the various stages of spiritual development undergone on the path to human perfection. Through these stages the invisible or "subtle" human reality (*al-lajfāt al-insāniyyah*), which we will refer to here, for want of a better term, as the "self", experiences a transformation or restructuring. It begins its journey at a level of imperfection deriving from the natural human tendency to "forgetfulness" (*ghaflah*), represented mythically by the fall of Adam. Revelation appears as a message from God that "reminds" (*tadhkīr*) the human being of his Covenant with God before he entered into this world (cf. Qur'an 7:172). Once a person accepts the message, he enters onto a long path of struggle (*jihad*) against his own negative tendencies.

Though the self is considered to be a single reality, it possesses different interior dimensions or tendencies or aspects. Otherwise there could be no question of a person's "struggling against himself." A large number of terms are employed in Islamic texts to refer to the different aspects of the self, the most important being "spirit" (*rūh*), "heart" (*qalb*), "intellect" (*'aql*), and "soul" (*nafs*); the relationships among these and other terms has been the subject of many treatises.³ Though no serious attempt has yet been made to classify and correlate the different definitions of these terms as found in the writings of the great Muslim authorities, it is clear that the use of terms is fluid rather than fixed. For example, soul and spirit are used interchangeably by some authors and differentiated by others.

Among the various schools of Islamic thought, the Sufis dedicated the most effort to explaining the implications of the different references to the self and its multiple dimensions in the sources of the Tradition, i.e., the Qur'an and the Hadith.

In general, Sufi exegesis differs from that of other schools of thought, especially dogmatic theology (*Kalām*), by its refusal to be limited by literal-minded interpretations. The Sufis were always ready to accept the apparent, literal meaning of Qur'anic verses and hadith so long as they were not asked to ignore other possible modes of interpretation. For example, the Qur'anic stories about conflicts between the prophets and the unbelievers were accepted at face value, but they were also understood to refer to the situation of the self. In the words of Rūmī (d.1273),

"This mention of Moses has become a shackle on men's mind,

they think these stories happened long ago.
 The mention of Moses serve as a mask ...
 Moses and pharaoh are in your own existence, you must seek
 these two adversaries in yourself."⁴

Though the dogmatic theologians and the more literal-minded Qur'anic exegetes show a clear tendency to understand such terms as spirit and soul in a concrete, reified sense, in general Muslim thinkers readily acknowledged that things of the "unseen world" (*al-ghayb*), to the extent that they were near to God and separate from the "visible world" (*al-shahādah*) of which we have direct perception, are not completely knowable. Dogmatic theology tends to emphasize God's transcendence (*tanzīh*), while the Sufis add that He is also immanent (*tashbīh*). But transcendence was understood to involve a profound unknowability, the word *tanzīh* means literally "to consider something incomparable" with anything of which we have knowledge. This attribute of unknowability and inaccessibility was easily transferred to those unseen things which are near to God. Thus for example, in creating man God breathed into him of His own Spirit (Qur'an 15:29, 32:9, 38:72), and this was understood to mean, among other things, that the "divine" human spirit is not immediately accessible to our knowledge, especially since a Qur'anic verse declares: "They will ask thee [O Muhammad] concerning the spirit. Say: 'The spirit is of the command of my Lord; and of knowledge you have been given but a little' " (17:85).

In general, the Sufis employed the term "soul" to refer to the self inasmuch as it is a reality that must be transformed through the spiritual journey. At its inception, the soul has no independent existence; gradually it gains a kind of self-subsistence that will become the basis for the individual's continued existence after the death of the body. For our present purposes, we will be looking at the soul once it reaches a sufficient stage of self-consciousness to assume a certain responsibility for its own development. The Islamic tradition locates this point at puberty, when the individual becomes duty-bound (*mukallaf*) to follow the injunctions of Islamic law, in particular the ritual practices.

According to the general Islamic and Sufi view of reality, human beings exist on a vertical axis connecting the lowest dimension of reality, the visible world, with the highest dimension, the transcendent God.⁵ To the extent that a person clings to the lower reaches of this axis and refuses to struggle against his own limited consciousness, his soul will remain imperfect and forgetful. To the extent he is able to turn his attention to the upper reaches of the axis and in effect "ascend" toward God, his soul becomes mindful and perfect. The Sufis saw a clear reference to the possibility of the soul's ascent into a realm of perfection in various Qur'anic verses. Thus the person who clings to the visible world and is forgetful of

his human possibilities as God's designated "vicegerent" (*khalīfah*) is dominated by the "soul that commands to evil" (Qur'an 12:53). As a person "remembers" his true nature and undertakes the task of turning his attention and endeavor towards perfection and "proximity to God" (*qurb*), his soul comes to be called the "blaming soul" (75:2), i.e., the soul that criticizes itself for its own shortcomings. Finally, if the person perseveres in his struggle against his own forgetful tendencies and succeeds in attaining perfection, his soul is said to be "at peace" with God (89:27). This last stage is the goal of human existence, attained only by the prophets and the "friends of God" (*awliya' Allah*), though potentially accessible to all human beings.

If the self's transformation can be described in terms of a journey from imperfection to perfection, or from forgetfulness to remembrance and mindfulness, it can also be understood as a passage from dispersion to unity. The self is a single reality with multiple faculties and dimensions. Its oneness lies in the direction of the divine/human spirit, while its multiplicity pertains to the side of the body with its many parts and functions. Here the geometrical image is that of a point at the centre of a circle. The more the self turns towards its own center or source, the spirit, the more it becomes integrated and whole. But the more it tends towards the circumference, the body and the world, the more it becomes dispersed. "Perfection" or full "remembrance" then corresponds to awareness situated at the center of the circle. The circumference no longer attracts the self, thereby drawing it into dispersion, but instead represents the self's active and conscious self-manifestation within the bounds of its own perfected nature.

Many more images and symbols are employed to explain the changes that the self undergoes in its growth towards wholeness and perfection. In what follows an attempt will be made to show how three of the great Sufis explain the self's growth and transformation. Two of them make extensive use of the symbolism of masculine and feminine, and this fact can help us draw certain general conclusions about how the concept of male and female is dealt with in Sufi literature.

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In his famous *Ihya' 'ulūm al-dīn* ("Revivification of the Religious Sciences") al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111) devotes a section to "explaining the wonders of the heart."⁶ He discusses among other things the various meaning that have been given by the tradition to the four terms mentioned above and explains his own reasons for choosing "heart" as the fundamental designation for that

human reality which must be transformed by the spiritual life. Briefly, the heart is the essence of the human being, the spirit the source of perception and awareness, the soul the human self which undergoes transformation, and the intellect the heart inasmuch as it perceives the realities of things.⁷ The four terms refer to the human subtle reality, but from different points of view.

Al-Ghazzālī's discussion of the nature of the human self is extremely complicated and cannot be dealt with here, though it may be useful to look at one part of his analysis to bring out a typical approach to this subject as found in Islamic texts. The framework he provides can also help situate the use of the masculine/feminine complementarity developed by others within the context of Islamic spiritual psychology in general.

Al-Ghazzālī sees the self as made up of different tendencies or attributes which must be brought into equilibrium (*i'tidal*) before the human being can reach the perfection for which he was created. The two basic tendencies, the "lordly" (*rabbānī*) and the "satanic" (*shayṭānī*), pull the self in opposite directions, the one ascending towards God, the other descending toward the world. As long as the satanic tendency dominates, and this corresponds to the forgetful state of most people, the soul will remain at the stage of "commanding to evil." If the ascending tendency gains the upper hand, the soul will eventually attain to "peace with God." Two other tendencies of the self are negative as long as the satanic tendency dominates but become positive if they can be placed under the domination of the lordly tendency. Thus, concludes Al-Ghazzālī, it is "as though the total in man's skin is a pig, a dog, a satan, and a wise man.

"The pig is passion (or concupiscence, *shahwah*), for a pig is not blameworthy because of its color, shape, and form, but because of its greed, covetousness, and avidity. The dog is anger (or irascibility, *ghaḍab*), for the beast of prey and the vicious dog are not "dog" and "beast of prey" because of their form, color, and shape. The true meaning of "predatoriness" is rapacity, animosity, and viciousness.

"Within the human being are found the rapacity and anger of the predatory animal and the greed and lust of the pig. Through greed the pig invites to indecency and abomination, while through anger the dog invites to wrongdoing and harm. The satan never ceases stirring up the passion of the pig and the anger of the predatory animal. He goads the one by the other and makes their natural instincts appears beautiful to them.

"The duty of the wise man, who is a symbol for the intellect, is to repel the cunning and deceit of the satan by employing his

penetrating insight and illuminating and clarifying light to unveil the satan's dissimulations. The wise man has to lessen the greed of the pig by making the dog its master, since anger can break the force of passion. He also must repel the rapacity of the dog by making the pig dominate and rule over it. If the wise man is able to achieve this, equilibrium will be established and justice will appear in the kingdom of the body. All will walk upon the Straight Path."

Here it is important to note that once "equilibrium" has been established through the rule of the intellect, every attribute of the self plays a positive role. The faculties of concupiscence and irascibility, for example, become positive goods, since only through them can the soul attend to the affairs of the body and continue to live in the world. In other world, the "biological" dimensions of the self are wholly good, so long as they are kept in proper harmony and correct balance by the intellect's governance. It also needs to be emphasized that by "intellect" Al-Ghazzālī does not mean the dry reasoning power of the philosophers, but the divine spark within man that naturally tends toward its own source and hence, having recognized the religious prescriptions as the only path to ultimate felicity, follows in the footsteps of the prophets.

Al-Ghazzālī continues by pointing out that if the wise man, the intellect, does not succeed in governing the other faculties of the self,

"they will overcome him and place him at their service, so he will spend his time in devising stratagems and sharpening his wits so that the pig can eat its fill and the dog be content. Thus he will remain forever a servant of the dog and the pig, and this is the situation of most people ...

"Moreover, through serving the dog and the pig, a person is serving the satan. So let every human being watch carefully over his movement and his rest, his speech and his silence, his standing and his sitting. Let him look with the eye of insight. Then if he is just with himself, he will see that he is striving all day long in serving these three. This is the utmost limit of wrongdoing, for he has made the master a slave, the lord a vassal, the commander a servant, and the ruler the ruled. The intellect is worthy of leadership, domination, and authority, but he has put it under the sway of the dog, the pig, and the satan."⁸

This inversion of the proper relation among the self's attributes results in a large number of character flaws and ugly moral traits, with Al-Ghazzālī describes in detail. But if the proper relation can be established, so that the

intellect rules and equilibrium results, the self's negative tendencies will be transformed. Concupiscence and the ugly moral traits that accompany it will become chastity, contentment, tranquility, asceticism, piety, godfearingness, joyful expansion, modesty, and gracefulness. In the same way irascibility and its accompanying vices will be transformed into such traits as courage, generosity, forbearance, patience, clemency, forgiveness, steadfastness, and gravity. This, it seems, is the situation alluded to by the Prophet when he said that every human being is born with a satan inside himself. When asked if he was including himself, he answered, "Yes, but my satan has become a Muslim at my hand, so he only commands to the good."

"So the heart is like a mirror. All these things surround it and have an effect upon it. Their traces constantly reach the heart. The praiseworthy effects which we have mentioned increase the polish, luminosity, and brilliance of the heart's mirror, until finally the plain evidence of the Truth will sparkle within and the desired goal of religion will be unveiled ... In such a heart the remembrance (*dhikr*) of God becomes firmly entrenched. "Verily in the remembrance of God hearts find peace" (The Qur'an 13:28).

"But blameworthy effects are like a dark smoke mounting up to the heart's mirror. It keeps on gathering there until the heart become dark and black, totally veiled from God. God calls this sealing and rust. He says, "No indeed, but what they were earning has rusted upon the hearts" (The Qur'an 83:14). Likewise He says, "Did We will, We would smite them because of their sins, sealing their hearts so they do not hear" (The Qur'an 7:100).⁹

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Shihāb al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ Suhrawardī (d. 1234) was one of the greatest Sufi masters of Islamic history. Nephew of the founder of the Suhrawardiyyah Order, he held an important position under the caliph al-Nāṣir and wrote a classic manual of Sufi theory and practice called *'Awārif al-ma'ārif* ("Gift of Mystic Knowledge"), a book which is usually considered to have been the single most influential handbook of Sufism. There he presents a complex and densely argued outline of a spiritual psychology employing the imagery of the father-spirit, the mother-soul, and the heart-child. Instead of expanding upon his discussion in my own words, I will follow the Persian

translation and commentary upon this passage by 'Izz al-Dīn Maḥmūd Kāshānī (d. 1334-35) in *Miṣbāḥ al-hidāyah* ("The Lamp of Guidance") a work which was to a certain degree inspired by the 'Awārif and which has enjoyed a popularity almost as wide.

Like other authorities, Kāshānī recognizes that the soul cannot be defined exactly, since the term is applied to the whole inward dimension of the human reality, which is ultimately unlimited in the direction of the Divine. Each human soul is made up of a wide range of tendencies and faculties, and these moreover belong not to the visible world that is accessible to observation, but to the unseen world that can only be grasped through the revelations given to the prophets or through spiritual experience. But each human being's grasp of the soul will be different, and no one can have access to the whole range of possibilities that the soul encompasses.

"Our purpose is to explain this soul, even though knowledge of all its attributes is impossible, for it possesses the characteristics of a chameleon. At each instant it displays a new color, every hour it takes upon another shape The Prophet connected knowledge of God to knowledge of the soul and made the former conditional upon the latter [when he said, "He who knows his soul knows his Lord"]. This indicates that no created being can know the soul in all its attributes or attain to the inmost core of its knowledge, any more than knowledge of God's inmost core can be attained. Moreover, just as knowledge of the soul in itself is impossible, so also its states cannot be controlled in a fitting manner. Hence 'Alī said, "I and my soul are like a shepherd and his sheep. Whenever I gather them from one side, they run off in the other direction.""¹¹

Kāshānī then proceeds to describe the three stages of the soul discussed above: the soul that commands to evil, the blaming soul, and the soul at peace with God. He points out that corrupt and blameworthy moral traits derive from the soul that commands to evil, while the virtues that begin to manifest themselves in the blaming soul and become firmly established in the soul at peace derive from the spirit. But as to the exact nature of the spirit, that is even more mysterious than the nature of the soul. Nevertheless, the relationship between the spirit and the soul can be grasped by reference to the structure of the cosmos.

According to Islamic cosmological teachings accepted by most authorities, the created universe is governed by the "Universal Spirit" and the "Universal Soul," the first of which Kāshānī calls the "Greatest Spirit" while identifying it with the spirit that God breathed into man. In creating the Greatest Spirit, says Kāshānī, God bestowed upon it two visions (*nazar*), "one for contemplating the majesty of God's beginningless Power and the other for

gazing upon the beauty of His endless Wisdom." Both of these visions are referred to as "intellect," but one is turned toward God while the other is turned toward creation. According to a well-known saying of the Prophet, "The first thing God created was the Intellect. He said to it, 'Turn this way,' so it turned towards God; and He said to it, 'Turn that way,' so it turned away from Him." Like other authorities Kāshānī identifies the Greatest Spirit with this First Intellect, which prophetic tradition also calls the Pen and "My Spirit" (i.e., the "Muhammad Spirit"). But by distinguishing between the two directions of the Intellect's gaze, Kāshānī is able to say that inasmuch as the Intellect is gazing toward God, it is called the "Intellect" proper, while inasmuch as it is gazing toward creation, it gives birth to a second principle known as the Universal Soul.¹² At this point he makes explicit the origin of masculine/feminine complementarity within the created universe:

"Between God's Spirit and the Universal Soul, as a result of [the correlation between] activity and receptivity and strength and weakness, the relationship of masculinity and femininity makes its appearance and the custom of mutual love and intimate embracing becomes established. Because of this mixture and marriage, the creatures of the universe are born into existence. They enter into the world of manifestation at the hand of the midwife, destiny, from the womb of the Unseen. Hence all creatures are offspring of the Soul and the Spirit, while the Soul is the offspring of the Spirit. For God created the Spirit without any intermediate cause, a fact that is alluded to [in the Qur'an] by the word "Command." In the same way He created all creatures by means of the Spirit, and these are called "Creation." 'Verily, His are the Creation and the Command. Blessed be God, the Lord of the worlds' (The Qur'an 7:54).¹³

Though Kāshānī and others distinguish between the Universal Spirit and Universal Soul, these should not be considered fundamentally distinct, since multiplicity and separation do not begin to become manifest in the form of clearly differentiated entities until the corporeal world and the conditions of space and time. Hence the Spirit and the Soul may best be understood as two tendencies of a single spiritual substance that together bring the world of corporeal things into existence. They are the spiritual principles of all duality within creation.

As God's one creature through whom all other creatures come into existence, the Spirit comprehends all the Divine Names and Attributes, of which the cosmos in its full amplitude and deployment is the outward manifestation. The spirit is the first point in the Circle of Existence, while the human being, made in God's image, is the last.

"Once the Circle of Existence reached its last point, which coincided with the first, the outward form of the Spirit came to be reflected in the mirror of the existence of the human being made of dust. All the Divine Names and Attributes manifested themselves within him. Then God called out, "Verily I am placing a vicegerent in the earth" (The Qur'an 2:30).¹⁴

Hence mankind, by virtue of being created in the divine image and manifesting the Spirit, was made God's vicegerent upon earth and given responsibility over himself and the other creatures. But just as the spiritual world displays two fundamental tendencies, the Spirit and the Soul, so all things in the corporeal world manifest duality within their very forms. According to the Qur'an, God says, "And of everything We created pairs" (51:49). A typical commentary explains that by pairs is meant male and female among living things and complementary kinds among inanimate things: heaven and earth, sun and moon, night and day, land and sea, winter and summer, truth and falsehood, sweet and bitter, etc.¹⁵ Elsewhere the Qur'an says, "God Himself created the pairs, male and female" (53:49). The Qur'an uses the word pairs repeatedly in the context of social teachings to mean spouses, i.e., husband and wife. Hence Muslims saw the duality that begins in the spiritual world in the two tendencies known as Spirit and Soul manifested within the corporeal world as all the pairs, among which are male and female. Moreover, the attributes of spirit (*ruh*: grammatically masculine) are always seen in Islamic texts as primarily masculine, while those of the soul (*nafs*: grammatically feminine) are seen as primarily feminine. Hence the correspondences spirit/male and soul/female hardly appear surprising in the context. Kāshānī continue,

"Just as Adam's existence in the visible world is the locus of manifestation for the form of the Spirit in the unseen world, so also Eve's existence in the visible world is the locus of manifestation for the form of the Soul in the unseen world. Her birth from Adam - for God says, "He created from Adam his mate" (The Qur'an 4:1) - is an image of the birth of the Soul from the Spirit. Thus the effect of the marriage of Soul and Spirit and the relationship there established between masculinity and femininity were transferred to Adam and Eve. Moreover, just as the created things issued forth from the Spirit and the Soul, so also the seeds of the human race, which were entrusted to Adam's reins (The Qur'an 7:172), were brought into existence through the marriage of Adam and Eve. Hence the existence of Adam and Eve is a transcription of the existence of the Spirit and the Soul. Moreover, in each human individual another transcription has been copied from the transcription of Adam and Eve's existence, i.e., through the marriage of the particular spirit and the particular soul and the birth of the heart from these two".¹⁶

But the heart is not born "once and for all." It continually comes into existence between the spirit and the soul, just as the universe is reborn at each instant as the result of the marriage between the Universal Spirit and the Universal Soul. The Qur'anic verse, "Everything is perishing but His Face" (28:88), was understood to mean that only the Essence of God is fixed and stable. In contrast, all creatures in the universe undergo constant flux and change. According to Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240), this is the meaning of the "new creation" referred to in the Qur'an (50:15) and like Kāshānī he locates the human experience of this constant flux in the heart. 17

In Kāshānī's view, the heart is the centre of awareness and the locus of spiritual growth. Though it undergoes continual transformations, it is always conditioned by its mother, the soul, which, as we have seen, possesses three basic levels of development. As the soul advances from the stage of "commanding to evil" to that of being "at peace with God" the heart undergoes concordant changes. But like the spirit and the soul, the heart cannot truly be known:

"Knowledge of the attributes of the heart as they are in themselves is impossible. It is even difficult to speak about the heart, since it undergoes constant transmutation in the stages of the spiritual states (*ahwāl*) and continual advancement in the ascending degrees of the perfection. Because of this "transmutation" (*taqallub*, from the root q-l-b) it is known as the "heart" (*qalb*). Since the spiritual states are divine gifts, and since these gifts never end, the transmutation and advance of the heart in the degrees of perfection and the ascending stages of eternal Beauty and Majesty are infinite. Hence the heart's attributes and states cannot be contained within the measure of enumeration and definition. If a person tries to define and enumerate them, when he looks carefully he will know for certain that in reality he is only defining the limits of his own perception and clarifying the share of his own ontological capacity".¹⁸

In short, the heart stands between the spirit and the soul. Its ultimate fate, and the fate of the human individual to whom it belongs, depends upon whether it rises towards the spirit or descends towards the soul that commands to evil. To prove this point, Kāshānī quotes a saying of the Prophet:

"There are four kinds of hearts: There is a bare heart within which is a shining lamp, the heart of the believer. There is a black and inverted heart, the heart of unbeliever. There is a heart bound by attachments, the heart of the hypocrite. And there is a layered heart, within which are both faith and hypocrisy. The faith within it is like a plant nourished by good

water, while the hypocrisy within it is like a boil nourished by pus and filth. The heart will be judged by whichever nourishment dominates over it."¹⁹

Kāshānī explains the meaning of this hadith in terms of the love and mutual attraction that exist between the spirit and soul. Note here that the soul is envisaged first in its ordinary or forgetful state that must be overcome, i.e., as the soul that commands to evil. The soul remains a negative tendency as long as it does not become mindful of its own source, the Divine Spirit. "The spirit," says Kāshānī,

"wants to draw the soul to its own world, while the soul wants to draw the spirit to its own world. They remain in this struggle and mutual attraction. Sometimes the spirit dominates and pulls the soul from the centre of lowness to the station of elevation. Sometimes the soul dominates and pulls the spirit from the heights of perfection to the depth of imperfection. The heart constantly follows the side that dominates, until finally one or the other establishes its rule over the realm of existence and the heart becomes firmly fixed in following it."²⁰

If the tendencies of the spirit dominate completely over those of the soul, the spirit will turn towards its source and contemplate the divine presence. As a result,

"the heart will advance and ascend from its own station, which involves constant transformation, to the station of the spirit, and there it will become firmly entrenched. In this case it is like a child who imitates and takes the side of its father. Then the soul will leave her locus and abode, i.e., the world of nature, and follow after the heart, her child, until she reaches the heart's station. Such a heart is the heart of a believer in which there is no trace of dispersion and unbelief."²¹

In contrast, if the soul should dominate over the spirit, then the latter will be drawn down to the station of the heart, the heart will come down to the level of the soul, and the soul will drive its roots deeply into the soil of the natural world. This is the inverted and blackened heart of the unbeliever. But if neither the spirit nor the soul is able to dominate while the soul is stronger, the heart will remain forever wavering between the two, though it will be more inclined towards the soul; such is the heart of the hypocrite. In the same way, if the spirit should have the upper hand or if the two should be more or less equal in strength, this will be the layered heart, one face of which is in unbelief and the other in the faith.²²

* * *

Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273) was the greatest and most prolific of Sufi poets. He presents a vast tapestry of Sufi teachings covering every manner of topic related to the stages of spiritual development undergone by the traveler on the path to God. He employs feminine imagery in a number of instances, for example in his general depiction of the Beloved, the goal of the spiritual traveler, in terms of feminine beauty, or in occasional references to the feminine attributes of the soul at peace with God.²³ But when Rūmī focuses upon the state of imperfect souls in order to persuade his readers to increase their effort on the spiritual path, he always portrays feminine attributes in a negative light. His psychological profile of the aspirant on the path to God points to the contrast between the active qualities of the intellect and the passive qualities of the soul that commands to evil, a contrast that is often depicted in a male/female imagery. It is this negative portrayal of the soul's feminine attributes that will be emphasized here, a detailed description of the positive portrayal being left for another occasion.

Rūmī maintains that the traveler to God must strive to make contact with his own spirit by following the guidance of revelation and the intellect and by overcoming the demands of the soul that commands to evil. He often refers to the latter simply as passion or concupiscence, the outwardly directed tendency that man shares with the animals. Like al-Ghazzālī, he sometime employs animal symbolism, referring to this soul as the pig, the dog, the cow, and the donkey. Unlike al-Ghazzālī, he usually does not distinguish between the soul's "predatory" and "beastly" attributes. Of course he was perfectly aware of these kinds of distinctions, but usually preferred to lump the soul's negative attributes together into a single category. In some passages he singles out these tendencies, often using animal symbolism. For example, in a long section in the *Mathnawī* he tells stories about the duck, the peacock, the crow, and the rooster: respectively greed, ambition, false hopes, and passion.²⁴

Rūmī explains the nature of the relationship between the intellect and passion or the soul that commands to evil by quoting a prophetic saying:

"God Most High created the angels and placed within them intellect, He created the beasts and placed within them passion, and He created the children of Adam and placed within them both intellect and passion. So he whose intellect dominates his passion is higher than the angels, and he whose passion dominates his intellect is lower than the beasts."²⁵

Human perfection is attained when the intellect governs the soul and its passion and puts them to work for their proper ends. Though the soul is here obedient and receptive towards the intellect, it is in its own turn active and dominant in relation to its own animal tendencies and the body. In other words, the soul is not simply "feminine," it is feminine in relation to the

intellect and masculine in relation to attributes such as concupiscence and irascibility. This is the "rule of the wise man" described by al-Ghazzālī, in which all things achieve their proper equilibrium. But Rūmī does not consider this rule the highest stage of human perfection, since within it a certain multiplicity of tendencies can still be discerned. He emphasizes that the perfect self will not be centered in the intellect, but in God. Ultimate human perfection allows of no duality whatsoever, while love is the vehicle that brings about the final transformation.²⁶

As long as the individual is governed by the soul that commands to evil, the intellect's light is eclipsed and the soul remains passive towards the world. In other words, using al-Ghazzālī's terminology, the soul's satanic tendency rules, passion and anger have free rein, and the intellect is made the servant of these three tendencies. The soul that commands to evil takes an active and "masculine" stance in relation to a passive and "feminine" intellect. In Rūmī's words,

"Alas for him whose intellect is feminine and whose lower soul is masculine and prepared!
Without question his intellect will be vanquished; he will be taken only toward loss."

Rūmī follows these two verses by a description of the traveler who has advanced on the way toward achieving peace with God by following the dictates of the intellect:

"Happy is he whose intellect is masculine and whose lower soul is feminine and helpless!..."²⁷

Here the soul can no longer be considered as a negative tendency, unless it still attempts to turn away from the intellect and the Divine Spirit. If the traveler perseveres in following the intellect and then through love passes beyond all created things, he will achieve a state in which all of his dimensions, spirit or intellect, soul, and body, are integrated into the Divine Unity. Here Rūmī makes use of the myth of Adam and Eve in a manner reminiscent of Kāshānī:

"If duality were to leave our heart and spirit for a moment, our intellect would be Adam and our soul Eve."²⁸

* * *

The views of Rūmī and many other Sufis can be summarized as follows :
The soul is situated on a vertical axis or on the radius of a circle. It can

"ascend" by moving toward the center, or "descend" by moving toward the circumference. Prophecy and revelation, which manifest the light of the Universal Intellect in the outside world, call upon it to return to the center with the aid of the inward light, the intellect. But ignorance and unbelief call upon it to follow its own lowest instincts and to turn away from anything but its immediate appetites. This is the "descending" or "centrifugal" route of passion.

In its "normal" forgetful state, the soul is passive or "feminine" toward passion and active or "masculine" toward God and the intellect. The soul that commands to evil displays its true nature by opposing the Divine Will as manifested both in religion and in its own inward light. To the extent the soul becomes aware of the guiding light of the intellect within itself and turns away from passion, it enters onto the stage of the "blaming soul," where intellect is dominant but passion has still not been overcome. In other words, the soul is here an ambiguous mixture of masculine and feminine characteristics. Sometimes it is receptive towards the intellect, thus overcoming passion. But to the extent it is still imperfect, it is influenced and dominated by passion. If the soul perseveres in its ascent towards the spirit, the intellect will eventually assume complete control and the soul will attain the station of peace with God. Here the soul's femininity is totally positive, since it corresponds to complete surrender to the intellect or the Divine Spirit. At the same time, the soul achieves perfect masculinity towards the world and passion. These can no longer influence it in the slightest degree to turn away from the Divine Will.

In the Islamic view, the human perfection realized when the soul attains to the stage of peace with God means that the will of the individual is totally integrated into the Divine Will. Every command and prohibition of God becomes the natural tendency of the soul. Through the full actualization of the intellect, the human being is able to see all things in their proper places and act accordingly. Duality and dispersion, the result of following the soul's descending tendency, are left behind.

This state of human perfection may be referred to in either masculine or feminine imagery, depending upon whether the intellect or the soul is envisaged. In most cases the domination of the intellect over the soul is kept in view, in accordance with the hierarchy of the universe. In other words, the Universal Intellect (or Greatest Spirit), sometimes called the Great Adam,²⁹ was created first, and from it the Universal Soul came into being. Hence masculinity precedes femininity in an ontological sense. In the same way the spirit or intellect has a natural and necessary priority over the soul within the human being, so "man" must rule over "woman."

But it is never the mere fact of priority that was important for the Sufis, rather, what this priority meant for the practitioner. The Sufis were not philosophers interested in knowledge for its own sake. Knowledge had to

be an aid on the path to God, a pointer towards the Divine. In Rūmī words,

"True thought is that which opens up a way, the true Way that upon which a king advances.
The true king is he who is a king within himself, not through treasuries and armies."³⁰

For Rūmī and others, feminine attributes become negative only in the context of the attitude of the spiritual traveler. In order to attain to human perfection, a person must be a "man", i.e., someone whose intellect dominates over his or her soul. A "woman" then is someone whose soul that commands to evil rules over his or her intellect.

Though Rūmī suggests that there may be a certain correlation between a person's outward form and his or her inward reality, he makes clear that a person of the female sex who enters onto the spiritual battlefield becomes a "man," just as a worldly man is in this respect a "woman." Hence writes,

"Since women never go out to fight the holy war, how should they engage in the Greater Holy War [i.e., the war against the soul that commands to evil]?"

Except rarely, when a hero like Rustam is hidden within a woman's body, as in the case of Mary.

In the same way, women are hidden in the bodies of those men who are feminine [in the way of religion] from faintness of heart."³¹

Sufis sometime quote an Arabic proverb that makes these points succinctly: "The seeker of the Lord is male (*ṭālib al-mawla mudhahkhar*).³² In this context it is easy to understand the meaning of the remark of the famous Bāyazīd (d. ca. 874) about the wife of another well-known Sufi, Aḥmad ibn Khadrūyah (d. 854): "Whoever would wish to see a man hidden in women's clothing, let him look at Fāṭimah."³² In the same vein, 'Aṭṭār (d. 1220) writes as follows in the introduction to the section of his "Memorial of the Saints" (*Tadhkirat al-awliya'*) on the famous woman saint Rābi'ah (eight century):

"When a woman is a man on the path of God, one cannot call her a woman. Thus, according to 'Abbāsah Tūsī, 'When tomorrow on the Day of Resurrection the call goes up, 'O men!', the first person to step into the rank of men will be the Virgin Mary."³³

According to this way of looking at things, most people are "women," for,

as al-Ghazzālī put it, they have put themselves in the service of their lower souls; they spend their lives tending to the "dog" and the "pig" and hence are deficient in both intelligence and religion. That some people should be, in their external forms, female and others male follows from the very nature of existence, where all things have been created in pairs; neither praise nor blame attaches to either situation. But it is certainly blameworthy for any human being, whether male or female, to be a "woman" in relation to the world.

In the Sufi view, there are few if any of us who deserve the title "men" in this most important respect. According to the Prophet, one of the signs of the Last Day will be that the number of women far exceeds the number of men. It is not surprising that various Sufis have been predicting the imminent end of the world for centuries. Our problem today, or, for that matter, at any point in recorded human history, is not that men and women are not "equal" but that there are so few men to be found. Already in the thirteenth century Najm al-Dīn Rāzī (d. 1256) was lamenting the fact that there were hardly any men left upon the face of the earth, though he really did not find this strange, since, as he tells us, it was already the case in the time of the great al-Ḥallāj (d. 922):

"Ḥoseyn b. Maṣṣūr (al-Ḥallāj) had a sister who laid claim to manly intent on the Path, and was also beautiful. She would come to Baghdad with half of her face covered by a veil and the other half exposed. A great one came to her and asked, "Why do you not cover your face entirely?" She said: "Show me a man, that I may cover my face. In all of Baghdad, there is only half a man, and that is Ḥoseyn. If it were not for him, I would leave this half uncovered also!"³⁴

NOTES

1. Ibn al-'Arabī, *Fuṣuṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. "A. 'Afifi, Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabī, 1946, p. 217; cf. R.W.J. Austin (tr.), *Ibn Al'Arabī: The Bezels of Wisdom*, New York: Paulist Press, 1980, p. 275.
2. Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, I 2433-34, 2437; cf. W. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1983, p. 169.

3. Cf., e.g., N. Heer, "A Sufi Psychological Treatise," *Muslim World* 51, 1961, pp. 25-36, 83-91, 163-172, 244-258.
4. *Mathnawī*, III 1251-53; cf. Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 274.
5. Once God's immanence is taken into account, the picture changes, since then there can be no question of a reality "separate" from God. This second point of view, however, can only be considered after the soul has reached perfection. First the spiritual traveler must realize that he is *not* God; then only can he know that he *is* God. Affirmation of Self (God) depends on negation of self (ego). Thus Rūmī explains how the words "I am God" meant damnation for Pharaoh, but deliverance for al-Hallāj. Cf. Chittick, *Sufi Path*, pp. 191 ff.
6. see the partial translation of this section by R.J. Mc Carthy in *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of al-Ghazzālī's al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl and other Relevant Works of al-Ghazzālī*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980, pp. 363-382.
7. Mc Carthy in *Freedom and Fulfillment*, pp. 365-367.
8. *Ihyā'*. Cairo: Matba'at al-'Amirat al-Sharafiyyah, 1326/1908, III, p. 9; cf. Mc Carthy in *Freedom and Fulfillment*, pp. 376-378.
9. *Ihyā'*. p. 9-10. For an outstanding example of a similar discussion within the context of Islamic philosophy, see Ṭūsī, *The Nasirean Ethics*, tr. G. M. Wickens, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964, especially pp. 51-59.
10. *Miṣbah*, has sometime wrongly been called a "translation" of 'Awārif. See its partial and awkward English translation by H. Wilberforce Clarke: *The 'Awārif-l-Ma'ārif*, Calcutta: Government of India Central Printing Office, 1981 (reprinted New York: Samuel Wesiser, 1970).
11. *Miṣbah al-hidāyah wa miftah al-kifāyah*, ed. Jalal al-Din Huma'i, Tehran: Chapkhana-yi Majlis, 1325/1946, pp. 83-84.
12. Kāshānī's cosmology here is similar if not identical to that of most other Sufis, though his terminology and explanation of the origins of the supreme principles of creation may differ somewhat. Both Ibn al-'Arabī and Rūmī, for example, tend to contrast Intellect and Soul rather than Spirit and Soul.
13. *Miṣbah al-hidāyah*, p. 95.
14. *Ibid.*

15. Rashid al-Din Maybudi, *Kashf al-asrar*, ed 'A. A. Hikmat, Tehran: Ibn Sina, 1331-39/1952-60, IX, p. 322.
16. *Misbah al-hidayah*, p. 96. Kashani goes on to point out that whether a human individual is male or female depends upon the form that it reflects. "The birth of the male form derives from the form of the Universal Spirit, but mixed with the attributes of the Soul; the birth of the female form appears from the Universal Soul, but mixed with the attributes of the Spirit" (p. 96). So each human being, whether male or female, possesses both masculine and feminine characteristics in outward structure and psychological make-up.
17. Cf Toshihiko Izutsu, "The Concept of Perpetual Creation in Islamic Mysticism and Zen Buddhism," *Mélanges offerts à Henry Corbin*, ed, S II. Nasr, Tehran: McGill Institute of Islamic Studies, 1977, pp. 115-147.
18. *Misbah al-hidayah*, p. 97.
19. Ibid., pp. 99-100. Al-Ghazzali quotes the same hadith in discussing the heart, *Ihya'*, III, p. 10.
20. *Misbah al-hidayah*, p. 100.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., pp. 100-101.
23. Cf. Chittick, *Sufi Path*, pp. 286ff., p. 241 (D 5990).
24. Cf. *Mathnawi*, v 40ff.
25. Chittick, *Sufi Path*, p. 85 (slightly altered).
26. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 220-231, 318-323.
27. Cf. *Mathnawi*, v 2461-64; cf. *Sufi Path*, p. 165.